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Deepening German-Netherlands Defence Cooperation for Europe's Security Needs

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About the paper

This paper is based on input for an expert meeting on German-Dutch defence cooperation which took place in November 2012 in Brussels. The meeting was jointly organised by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' and the German Institute for International Security Affairs / SWP and involved civilian and military officials from the German and Dutch defence ministries and armed forces plus representatives from the European Parliament, the European Defence Agency, NATO and think tanks.

The text was also published as a SWP working paper and is available at: www.swp-berlin.org or by clicking [here](#)



Introduction

Multinational defence cooperation and planning in Europe is dominated by cluster-approaches whereby two or more countries work closely together in capability development. To date, neither the EU nor NATO has been able to integrate existing clusters into a coherent multilateral defence planning process. This uncoordinated approach is likely to persist for the time being as nations will probably maintain their full control over defence planning and programming.

In this context, the crucial question is how bilateral and regional initiatives for defence cooperation can be steered in such a way that they contribute effectively to better collective European capabilities rather than adding to fragmentation. On a general note, three criteria can be identified for the assessment of clusters: first, they should contribute as much as possible to the collective security needs of EU and NATO – to the degree that these needs are defined; second, they need to build on commonalities of the security outlooks of participating partners and, finally, they should build on the *acquis* of defence cooperation that has already been put in place.

Based on these criteria the prospects and potential for deepening German-Dutch defence cooperation can be assessed more systematically. More specifically, the build-up of expeditionary forces, the comprehensive approach to crisis management and maritime security would lend themselves as areas for deeper bilateral cooperation between Berlin and The Hague.

The Wider Context

Recent developments – the United States' increasing focus towards Asia and the Pacific as well as significant defence budget cuts – have substantially enhanced the need for closer defence cooperation within Europe. This has now become a necessity in order to collectively maintain the capabilities needed for Europe's security and defence. Bilateral defence cooperation between Germany and the Netherlands has the potential to become a building block to reinforce Europe's capacities. For instance, both countries have embraced a broad understanding of security challenges and have a proven track-record of cooperation at the intersection of civilian and military means. European capabilities are not just of a military nature. In crisis management operations the comprehensive approach requires military and civilian tools to be deployed in a concerted manner. Furthermore, the distinction between external and internal security has become blurred. Increasingly, military assets are used in support of civilian authorities for 'homeland' security tasks.



The Cluster Approach – Risks and Opportunities

So far, European governments have responded to the double challenge of maintaining and modernising capabilities with declining defence budgets by establishing or reinforcing clusters of defence cooperation. France and the United Kingdom cooperate under the Lancaster House Treaty. The Scandinavian countries have the Nordic Defence Cooperation. The BENELUX countries are also deepening their defence cooperation. Thus, it is obvious that German-Netherlands defence cooperation is not unique. It is a cluster among others. Neither is it new: it builds on successful accomplishments in the past. Naturally, these should be taken into account when undertaking efforts to deepen bilateral defence cooperation.

While the cluster approach is regarded as the best practical way forward to increase defence cooperation and even integration, it also raises questions. Overall coordination between the clusters – either in the multilateral structures of NATO and the European Union or in a more informal way – is lacking. In this situation, there is a risk that opportunities for improving capabilities at a larger scale or for guaranteeing interoperability and standardisation are neglected. Clusters might invest in out-dated legacy capacities. They can also run contrary to efforts to reform Europe's defence industrial base by limiting industrial cooperation to a small number of countries.

Roles of the EU and NATO

The European Union and NATO are key international organisations for improving overall European and Alliance capabilities. However, in the EU and NATO multinational defence cooperation and planning still resembles a jungle rather than a cultivated garden. Neither of these two organisations is systematically involved in the activities of the clusters. Most probably, the answer to this challenge will not be provided by procedures of the past. Rather, existing tools – like the NATO Defence Planning Process – will have to be adapted to new circumstances. A new instrument such as the European Defence Agency's Code of Conduct on Pooling & Sharing seems to be useful to assist the member states in multinational cooperation. Clusters can be drivers of deeper defence cooperation, embracing all its aspects: aligning defence plans, launching projects, combining acquisition and through-life management of the same equipment.

An overall review of the capabilities of EU member states is needed to assess the value of different clusters for the European capability development. Such a European Defence Review (EDR) which puts the existing national assets into a European perspective could be the first step to set up the framework of coordination within EU and NATO. In a second step, EU and NATO could significantly help harmonising and potentially better integrating the different clusters. An important way to do this would be to define 'collective' capability needs more clearly and translate it into more binding defence planning requirements. Member states, however, shy away from this more intrusive role of multilateral organisations. Short of this ambition, both organisations



will continue to play a role in managing projects, in particular in the context of the EU's Pooling & Sharing and NATO's Smart Defence initiative.

Scope for Deepening German-Netherlands Defence Cooperation

In an ideal world, German-Netherlands defence cooperation would add most value to European and transatlantic capability development if it were to be clearly framed by the collective needs for Europe's security, building on the accomplishments of bilateral cooperation in the past and reflecting commonalities in the security policy strategies and concepts of both countries. In the real world, Europe's security needs are not clearly defined. Neither do they fully overlap with both countries' security policies. However, Germany's ongoing defence reforms will increase its deployable capacities, further closing the gap between theory and practice.

Even in a world that is not ideal, the aforementioned criteria – European collective security needs, past record of bilateral cooperation and overlap of security policies – are a useful guide for deepening the bilateral defence cooperation between Berlin and The Hague. On this basis three areas can be identified: The construction of expeditionary forces, comprehensive approach in crisis management, and maritime security.

Expeditionary forces

The first area is the further development of expeditionary forces which are able to deploy rapidly to distant theatres, e.g. as an initial entry force to stop atrocities and/or prepare the ground for larger-scale stabilisation and reconstruction operations. Rapidly deployable, robust forces are at the heart of both the EU Battle Groups and the NATO Response Force. Both formations, however, have not been tested operationally due to political disagreements on their deployment. Moreover, in 2010 France and the United Kingdom have decided to build their own intervention capability – the *Combined Joint Expeditionary Force* – which is planned to be operational by 2016 and could be opened to other EU and NATO member states as well. Germany and the Netherlands both have air mobile forces, which could contribute to rapid deployment operations. Furthermore, the Dutch *11 Air Assault Brigade* and the German *Division Schnelle Kräfte* – to be constituted by reorganising existing units – are complementary capacities.

However, deployment of combined German-Netherlands Air Mobile-Air Assault Forces might be hampered by political constraints and caveats. In both countries domestic political factors play a central role when it comes to decision-making on deploying their armed forces. Germany has progressed tremendously since its no-go policy on out-of-area operations in the early nineties. Nevertheless, there is still political restraint to participate in operations that are located in the military high-end of the spectrum.



Comprehensive Approach

A second area of cooperation is Stabilisation and Reconstruction (S&R) operations. The European Union and NATO have engaged in S&R activities on different scales and with different intensities. In September 2011, NATO published its new Political Guidance to improve NATO's involvement in stabilisation and reconstruction. At the same time, however, military-led S&R has increasingly come under public fire in EU and NATO member states. There is currently not much appetite in Western publics to repeat large-scale state-building interventions, Afghanistan or Iraq-style. As a consequence, both organisations are likely to engage in less ambitious S&R-missions in the future ('statebuilding light'). Recent decisions to support Security Sector Reform and training in Africa (Sahel, Horn-of-Africa, Libya, Mali) with limited civilian and military resources indicate this trend. But be it large-scale or small-scale operations, integrating civilian and military aspects is a requirement for both.

Germany (Vernetzte Sicherheit) and the Netherlands (3D: Defence, Diplomacy, Development) have broad experience with the comprehensive approach. There are fewer policy restrictions as there is wide political support in both countries for contributing to S&R operations with the comprehensive approach. The 1st German-Netherlands Corps Headquarters in Munster already has specific knowledge and experience in planning and commanding operations under the comprehensive approach. This *acquis* could be used for building more structural cooperation, for example by establishing combined education and training facilities. A comprehensive approach training centre could also be opened to participation by other nations' military and civil personnel. It could thus serve wider needs of the EU and NATO.

Maritime security

Within the EU and NATO maritime security has become an increasingly important area of cooperation. This is true for the operational level (Operation Active Endeavour as well as Operations Ocean Shield and Atalanta to fight piracy at the Horn of Africa). It is also true for the more strategic level. In the beginning of 2011, NATO published its Alliance Maritime Strategy and in November of that same year, the Council adopted the EU's first Horn-of Africa Strategy which also has a strong maritime component. Moreover, since 2007, the EU has an Integrated Maritime Policy, which underlines the need for cross-sector (civil-military) cooperation. The European Defence Agency has set up a Maritime Surveillance information exchange network on such a cross-sector and cross-border basis. EDA is well-positioned within the EU to play an important role.

Germany and the Netherlands are important coastal European states with military and civil assets in support of maritime security. In 2003 The Hague unilaterally abandoned its maritime patrol capacity. Germany received about half of the Dutch P3 Orion aircraft, but the idea of assisting the Netherlands in maritime surveillance tasks was not explored. Both countries operate a variety of surface ships and submarines. There seems to be scope for deepening maritime cooperation, involving both naval assets as well as civilian tools across borders. Naval cooperation could encompass an industrial



dimension as both countries have shipbuilding capacities. Bilateral maritime security cooperation would also serve the needs of the EU and NATO. It should be a building block for EU- and NATO-wide maritime surveillance activities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the analysis on the prospects and potential for deepening German-Dutch defence cooperation the following seven recommendations can be made:

1. Clusters like the German-Netherlands defence cooperation should be fully exploited answering the double challenge of maintaining and modernising capabilities with declining defence budgets.
2. Clusters are drivers and instruments for deepening defence cooperation. This includes defence planning, launching projects and through-life management of cluster capabilities.
3. The EU and NATO should focus on coordination, monitoring and checking of clusters' plans and projects, in particular in order to ensure consistency between the various clusters and to assess if they contribute to improving capacities for Europe's security needs.
4. Efforts should be undertaken to define collective capability needs more clearly at NATO and EU levels. On this basis multilateral defence planning can be further developed in which bilateral and regional clusters could fit into.
5. Germany and the Netherlands should develop a combined air mobile/air assault capability in support of Europe's needs for expeditionary forces. As both countries' forces are complementary creating this combined capability is a win-win situation. Establishing a combined air mobile/air assault capability might also help to further align defence policies of the two countries. It would serve the EU and NATO who are in demand of initial entry capabilities for crisis management operations.
6. Germany and the Netherlands should expand their already existing cooperation on the comprehensive approach through the 1st GER-NL Corps Headquarters. The knowledge and experience vested in this HQ should be used for establishing a bilateral training centre for the comprehensive approach, which in due course can be opened to other nations' civilian and military personnel in support of the EU and NATO.
7. Germany and the Netherlands should investigate the potential for deepening bilateral cooperation in the area of maritime security, including all naval assets (maritime patrol aircraft, surface ships, submarines). Such cooperation should be a building block for reinforcing multinational maritime surveillance capacities – civil and military – in support of the EU and NATO.